DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 324 UD 011 552

AUTHOR	Walker, A. D.
TITLE	Implications of Generalized Expectancies of Black Children in Educational Settings.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Univ., Urbana. Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation.
SPONS AGENCY	Illinois State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield.
REPORT NO	WP-2
PUB DATE	[69]
NOTE	11p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Decision Making, *Educational Environment, Individual Characteristics, Individual Develcpment, *Individual Power, *Negro Students, Peer Acceptance, Self Control, Social Development, Social Experience, Socialization, Social Maturity, *Student Participation, *Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Rotter (Julian B)

ABSTRACT

A perception of limited autonomy in the environment of the low socioeconomic black child has important implications for educators. Firstly, since the educational setting is challenging and often fear-provoking for disadvantaged students, it would seem desirable to reduce the generalized expectancy of powerlessness that is characteristic of many of these children. A way to reduce some of the disastrous effects that the American school has often had on the disadvantaged child is to increase his perception of his personal responsibility in the outcomes of his education. Secondly, educational administrators would do well to strive to employ as many well-qualified black teachers as possible in order that black students could have a choice of teachers in terms of race. A third implication of the concept of internal-external control for education concerns the social rejection and isolation of black students by white students and teachers in desegregated schools. Rejection and isolation is largely seen by the black student as out of his control. (Author/JM)

ED051324

CIRCE

STATE OF ILLINOIS GIFTED PROJECT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

WORKING PAPER

(for interoffice use only)

No. 2

IMPLICATIONS OF GENERALIZED EXPECTANCIES OF BLACK CHILDREN IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

A. D. WALKER

Working Papers funded by
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction,
Ray Page, Superintendent

UD011552

Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation
University of Illinois

ED051324

IMPLICATIONS OF GENERALIZED EXPECTANCIES OF BLACK CHILDREN IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

A. D. WALKER
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois 61801

"No matter where we begin the study of psychological processes or phenomena, we must sooner or later deal with the problem of motivation." (Cofer and Appley, 1964). Any extensive review of the literature of experimental psychology reveals the existence of numerous assumptions and hypotheses about underlying motivational principles.

Similarly, there exists numerous definitions of motivation. Brown (1961) emphasizes the conditional nature of motivational variables. He contends that a specific variable is motivational "if:

(1) it tends to facilitate or energize several different responses,

(2) its termination or removal following a new response leads to the learning of that response,

(3) the sudden increase in the strength of the variable leads to the abandonment of responses, and

(4) its effect on behavior cannot be attributed to other processes such as learning, sensation, innate capacities, and sets."

While Brown does not consider "learning" and "sets" motivational variables, the position of Julian B. Rotter (1954) focuses centrally on the importance of these variables as motivating factors.

It will be the task of this paper to examine the nature of Rotter's Social Learning Theory and its contribution to explaining and understanding the behavior and performance of the black child in the American educational setting.

In Rotter's view, the unit of investigation in the study of personality is the interaction of the individual and his meaningful environment. Behavior of the human organism can be spoken of only in terms of the conditions necessary for its occurrence, not in terms of causality. Specific human behaviors occur only under certain conditions. Behavior is goal directed or motivated and the goals are learned or acquired as a result of satisfactions and frustrations controlled by other people. The determinants of behavior are the expectations and anticipations based on previous experience that these reinforcements will occur.

Social Learning Theory utilizes three basic constructs in the measurement and prediction of behavior:

(1) Behavior Potential--the potentiality of the occurrence of specific behavior in any given situation(s) as measured in relation to single reinforcement or a set of reinforcements.

(2) Expectancy--the probability held by the individual that a particular reinforcement will occur following specific behavior in a specific situation(s). In a given situation, expectancy may be formulated as a function of probability of occurrence as determined from past experiences in circumstances perceived as the same, and on the generalization of expectancies for the same or similar reinforcements to occur in other situations for the same or related behaviors.

(3) Reinforcement Value--the degree of preference for any one of several reinforcements to occur where the

possibilities of occurrence are equal. Such preferences are independent of expectancy.

Central to the focus of this paper is the construct of expectancy. The effect on an individual of a reinforcement following certain behaviors depends upon the nature of the pattern of expectancies that an individual has developed. The individual's pattern of expectancies concerning reward depends largely upon whether or not the individual perceives a causal relationship between his own behavior and the reward or reinforcement. When the subject views reinforcement as not being entirely contingent upon his action, the reinforcement is considered to have been due to fate, luck, chance or under the control of others. (Rotter, 1966.) When reinforcement is perceived in this way, Rotter terms this perception a belief in external control. Conversely, if the individual believes that reinforcement is dependent upon his own behavior or due to relatively permanent aspects of his individual nature, the person is said to possess a belief in internal control. In Rotter's formulation, the individual's perception of the source of reinforcements is termed "locus of control." Depending upon the individual's life experiences, his perception of the locus of control of reinforcement in his environment become generalized expectancies to similar and related situations.

Investigations into the nature of the construct locus of control using the Internal-External Scale (Rotter, Liverant, Crowne, 1961) have generally supported the hypotheses of Social Learning Theory. While most of these studies have not dealt specifically with the black child in educational settings they have shown a consistent relationship

to social class. Battle and Rotter (1963) found in a southern school, a significantly higher number of external lower class black children among black and white sixth and eighth graders than among either middle-class black children or upper or lower class white children. In this group of externally controlled black children there was a significant relationship between intelligence and externality. The more external children in this group were those who had higher intelligence quotients. An unpublished manuscript by Cellura (1963) reports similar findings to the effect that low socioeconomic status children who are external have obtained a higher educational level than their parents. Thus it appears that bright and educationally advanced children of low socioeconomic status perceive limited autonomy in their environments.

The consequences of perceived limited autonomy is well documented in the literature of social psychology. De Charms (1968) comments on the importance of "personal causation" versus control by others in determining an individual's behavior. Katz (1967) and Pettigrew (1967) have also shown the importance of perceived responsibility in determining academic success. Maehr (unpublished manuscript, 1969) states that degree of perceived choice appears to be a determinant of whether one sees himself "as an actor responsible for outcomes," or in short in control of situations. Dr. Maehr states that "whether the person sees himself to be free to perform in any given situation may well affect perceived locus of causation."

The perception of limited autonomy in the environment of the low socioeconomic black child has important implications for educators. First, since the educational setting is challenging and often fear-provoking for disadvantaged students (Katz, 1967), it would seem

POWERLESSNESS

desirable to reduce the generalized expectancy of powerfulness that is characteristic of many of these children. Granted that the school cannot and should not attempt to control all of the situations in any child's life, it does have potential control of the interpersonal atmosphere and general educational procedures within its domain. The American school has the power to control curriculum content, teacher selection, student evaluation and student involvement and participation. However, in regard to black children, many American schools have used their power to suppress and destroy any sense of personal worth and autonomy as well documented by Kozol in his book Death at an Early Age (1967).

A possible way to reduce some of the disasterous effects that the American school has often had on the disadvantaged child is to increase his perception of his personal responsibility in the outcomes of his education. Maehr and Videbeck (1969) have demonstrated that on experimental tasks, motivational level is low when subjects perceive that they are not responsible for the outcome of the task. The school, then, should permit the disadvantaged child some measure of self-selection of courses to be studied, and deciding the content of such courses. He should be allowed to make teacher ratings that are considered when teachers are hired and fired, and generally he should be allowed to participate in the decision-making process concerning aspects of the school situation that bear directly on his experience as a learner. Paradoxically, such decisions and involvement have become somewhat commonplace for students of higher socioeconomic status attending progressive schools and who already feel that the locus of control lies within themselves.

Second, educational administrators would do well to strive to employ as many well-qualified black teachers as possible in order that black students could have a choice of teachers in terms of race. Stallings (1959) observed in the Louisville school system, after the Supreme Court desegregation ruling of 1954, that the best educational gaines were made by those black children who chose to remain with black teachers in segregated classrooms. While Katz (1967) states that these gains "can only be attributed to factors other than desegregation, such as a general improvement in educational standards," it would be interesting to investigate whether or not such gains are due to general improvement in educational standards or whether such improvement is due to the presence of choice by students in the selection of teachers. Such choice might well be instrumental in fostering a sense of responsibility for educational outcome. As Maehr's preliminary work suggests, a perception of personal causation or responsibility is a critical variable in challenging situations.

The obvious argument against this hypothesis is that black pupils in segregated schools have traditionally achieved below the level of white pupils. If the perception of personal causation operates at all, why does it not operate in the segregated school to produce good academic achievement?

An equally obvious answer in terms of the hypothesis set forth, is that segregated schools are notoriously inferior in terms of qualified staff, academic standards, educational programs, administration and facilities. Plaut (1957) has summarized the inferior status of segregated schools succinctly when he quotes the 1955 Speaker of the Georgia House

of Representatives as saying that "Negro education in Georgia is a disgrace. What the Negro child gets in the sixth grade the white child gets in the third." Maehr's work (1968) provides another possible answer. In segregated schools black pupils have no choice but to attend a black school. In such situations it becomes readily understandable why children manifest high externalality; they have no control over their situation.

A third implication of the concept of internal-external control for education concerns the social rejection and isolation of black students by white students and teachers in desegregated schools. Besides the stressful nature of such ostracism which is cited by Coles (1963), rejection and isolation is largely seen by the black student as out of his control. There is nothing he can do about the fact that he is black. Thus, the experience of being rejected serves to reinforce externality in black students.

Consequently, it is necessary for American education to provide well qualified black administrators, teachers, and other black persons in positions of responsibility and authority to foster acceptance of the black student and to enhance the black pupil's perception of self-direction or internal locus of control.

While Rotter's Social Learning Theory provides guidelines in explaining some of the performance dynamics of low socioeconomic status students in educational settings it does little to suggest how much internal locus of control is desirable in an individual. Miller and Swanson (1958) have suggested that American culture, as a result of advanced technology, has virtually eliminated the stressing of self-directness (which I broadly see as a generalized belief in internal

control). They see Americans becoming "other-directed" in Riesman's terminology, and such other-directedness is an outcome of large bureaucracies which have arisen as a result of technology. With American culture as it is today, one may well ask how much internal-locus of control is desirable, and consequently how relevant is it that education strive to develop this personality variable?

The question of how much internality is desirable is not the only question unanswered by Rotter's formulation. There is also the question of how concepts of self, such as perceived locus of control, determine behavior. Maehr (1969) states that most theorizing done to date implies that self-factors influence and determine behavior but that available empirical data are limited or else irrelevant to the educational setting.

It is possible that social learning theory is oversimplified. A generalized expectancy or belief in either internal or external control is assumed to be predictive of the fact that the individual will overtly manifest this expectancy in risk-taking or challenging situations through his behavior. The theory does not seem to consider the possibility that human beings have beliefs in one direction and yet behave as if they believed differently. Ludwig Immergluck (1964) cogently illustrates this point. He writes that the "physical scientist, likewise, perceives and interacts with his daily life environment on a basis that is often much at variance with his scientifically derived knowledge. It is probably quite impossible for an astronomer to see the sun other than circling the earth, as he gazes out of his living room window; or for the physicist to regard the chair he is sitting on not as a solid object,

but as a swirling and ever-changing hive of atomic and subatomic particles."

One further criticism of the theory is that though Rotter denies causality, there appears at least an implicit acceptance of causality in the relationship between reinforcement, expectancy, and behavior potential. Though Social Learning Theory leaves some questions unanswered concerning motivational variables of human behavior in learning situations, it effectively focuses on the importance of the concept of "self." Whereas much of educational theorizing has been done from the standpoint of reinforcement theory without regard to the individual's perception of his role in eliciting such reinforcement, Rotter's theory adds the dimension of the self in terms of generalized expectancies of the individual. It is becoming increasingly clear that when attempting to solve the problem of motivating students (and especially black students*), teachers cannot effectively motivate without being somewhat aware of the student's regard for self (Maehr, 1969).

---

*My comment.

References

Battle, E. S., and Rotter, J. B. Children's feelings of personal control as related to social class and ethnic group. Journal of Personality, 1963.

Brown, J. S. The Motivation of Behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

Cofer, C. N. and Appley, M. H. Motivation: Theory and Research; New York; Wiley, 1964.

Coles, R. The desegregation of southern schools; A psychiatric study. New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1963.

De Charms, R. Personal Causation. New York: Academic Press, 1968.

Immergluck, L. Determinism-freedom in Contemporary Psychology: An Ancient Problem Revisited. American Psychologist, 1964.

Katz, I. The socialization of academic motivation in minority group children. In D. Levine (Ed.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1967. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1967.

Kozol, J. Death At an Early Age, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Maehr, M. L., and Videbeck, R. Predisposition to risk and persistence under varying reinforcement-success schedules. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol., 1968.

Miller and Swanson. The Changing American Parent. New York. Wiley, 1958.

Pettigrew, T. F. A Profile of the Negro American. Princeton, N. J.: Van Nostrand, 1964.

Plaut, R. L. Blueprint for talent searching. New York. National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, 1957.

Rotter, J. B. Social Learning and Clinical Psychology. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1954.

Rotter, J. B., Liverant, S., and Crowne, D. P. The growth and extinction of expectancies in chance controlled and skilled tests. Journal of Psychology, 1961.

Rotter, J. B. Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. Psychological Monographs, 1966.